

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 680

By Barker

A RESOLUTION to honor and congratulate the Union City Coca-Cola Bottling Company on the occasion of its 100th anniversary.

WHEREAS, from time to time, the members of this General Assembly recognize and pay homage to those venerable historical Tennessee businesses that have reached a milestone in their illustrious history; and

WHEREAS, the Union City Coca-Cola Bottling Company is one such revered business that has attained its 100<sup>th</sup> year of operation; and

WHEREAS, though Coca-Cola itself dates back to 1886, the beverage became tied to Union City in the year 1909, when Coke was first bottled at the Union City Bottling Company; and

WHEREAS, even before 1909, the groundwork for Coke's presence in Union City was being laid by Richard Newell Poindexter, the grandfather of current Chief Executive Officer, Newell Graham; Richard Poindexter, who already had several family members in the business, founded the Coca-Cola company in Meridian, Mississippi, in 1904; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Poindexter then convinced his brother-in-law, railroad businessman Hugh Smith, to look into franchising the company; Mr. Smith, better known by his nickname, "Coca-Cola Smith," purchased the franchise from the Carson family in Paducah, Kentucky, late in 1908 and began production in Union City in 1909; and

WHEREAS, the Union City plant started production in a building on South Division Street between East Church and East Main streets; in addition to the Union City plant, Mr. Smith also operated the Coke production plants in Martin, Dyersburg, Fulton, and Hickman, Kentucky; and

WHEREAS, when Coca-Cola Smith died in the 1940s, Newell Graham's parents, the late Hardy Graham and Cora Lee Poindexter Graham, partnered with Newell Graham's aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. Zed Hawkins, to purchase the Union City and Martin plants from the Smith estate; and

WHEREAS, Mr. and Mrs. Hardy Graham moved to Union City from Meridian in 1946 to run the Union City production plant; their son, Newell Graham, was born the following year in Union City, where he has lived his entire life; and

WHEREAS, Newell Graham grew up helping with the family business, and he remembers sweeping floors at the age of ten and first working full-time during his summer vacation when he was fourteen or fifteen years old; Mr. Graham would help his parents by sweeping the floor, separating returnable bottles, working in production, running a coin catering route, assisting the service people, and helping on bottle-can routes; and

WHEREAS, having watched his family and participated in every aspect of the family business, Newell Graham returned from college and the United States Navy in 1972 and shortly thereafter assumed the reins of the company; and

WHEREAS, he says he cannot pinpoint a specific point in time when his father entrusted him with the company, since his father never specifically told him he was in charge; and

WHEREAS, during its 100-year history, the Union City bottling plant has occupied only two locations; in 1968, the company expanded and moved production operations from South Division Street to its current location on East Reelfoot Avenue; and

WHEREAS, though Coca-Cola was produced in both locations, the carefully-protected secret syrup was never made locally; in the early years, the syrup would arrive in fifty-five-gallon barrels and then in 5,000-gallon tanker trucks in more recent years; and

WHEREAS, the local company added the carbonated water to the syrup, mixed it, bottled it, and then distributed the final product; and

WHEREAS, an innovative company that was always one step ahead of its contemporaries, the Union City Coca-Cola Bottling Company was the first bottler to switch to 100 percent plastic cartons and the first to use a plastic case, which Hardy Graham invented himself; and

WHEREAS, a deeply philanthropic man who was a community leader in numerous areas of public life, Hardy Graham never stood as the full-time manager of the bottling company but, instead, had a contract that only required him to work part-time; and

WHEREAS, this part-time schedule allowed him to hold several prestigious positions while standing as owner of the Union City plant; Hardy Graham served as the Mayor of Union City from 1950 until 1958, was School Board Chairman from 1958 until 1964, and stood as chairman of the local industrial board for two or three decades; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Graham's heavy community involvement also included a seemingly endless list of philanthropic contributions he carried out through the bottling company; the plant was involved in numerous fundraising efforts and was responsible for the construction of scoreboards for every school in its territory for nearly fifty years; and

WHEREAS, in the 1950s, Hardy Graham placed the first cinders on the local school track, and in the early 1960s, when Newell Graham was a member of the middle school basketball team, his father provided the heating system for the gymnasium; and

WHEREAS, while serving as Mayor of Union City, Hardy Graham challenged the city council to dig a hole and install a light for the football field; setting an example with his own actions, Mr. Graham personally dug his own hole to put up a light; and

WHEREAS, in addition to his Union City involvement, Hardy Graham was also instrumental in efforts that eventually transformed the University of Tennessee at Martin into a four-year institution; to honor Mr. Graham for his great assistance in the endeavor, the university stadium was named in his honor; and

WHEREAS, in the 1980s, Graham Park was also named in honor of Hardy Graham, who had donated some of the land on the east side of what was then known as Grove Creek Park; and

WHEREAS, a man who always had a hand in some form of community service, Hardy Graham was active in founding the now-thriving Rotary Scholarship Program and was instrumental in securing funds for the program from the Verhine Estate, which has enabled the program to give away about \$160,000 in Verhine and \$140,000 in regular Rotary Scholarships annually; and

WHEREAS, even with all of his civic roles, Hardy Graham was not the first generation of open-handed philanthropists in his family; both Hardy Graham and Newell Graham remember hearing stories about Coca-Cola Smith's efforts to help those in need during the Christmas season, driving to Samburg with a truck brimming with presents to distribute to needy families; and

WHEREAS, that legacy of public service and generosity has trickled down through each generation, as Hardy Graham managed the company with a philanthropic emphasis he has passed down to his son, Newell Graham, who has, in turn, passed it down to his son, Richard Graham, who stands as the current Operations Manager of the company; and

WHEREAS, since the days when Coca-Cola Smith oversaw the bottling company, the Grahams have witnessed countless changes, from the appearance of soft drink containers to the hundreds of beverages now carried by the Coca-Cola Company; one of the most significant local changes came in February of 2007 when the Union City plant stopped production; and

WHEREAS, the halt on production took place primary because the plant had reached a point at which it was not producing a large percentage of what it sold, making the transition a natural one; since 2007, the Union City Coca-Cola Bottling Company has functioned as a sales, distribution, and administration facility; and

WHEREAS, among the changes Newell Graham has witnessed are the evolution from the six and a half ounce bottle of Coke for a nickel, which is the earliest price he can recall, to the cans and sleek plastic bottles that are more prevalent in our society today; and

WHEREAS, to help commemorate their centennial, the Union City Coca-Cola Bottling Company filled every six and a half ounce glass bottle they had left, and they plan to give them away during their summer anniversary celebration; and

WHEREAS, to commemorate its anniversary, the company has planned a year-long celebration that will include several small events throughout the year; the main event will be a pre-Fourth of July celebration during which Union City Coca-Cola will serve 1,000 hot dogs, chips, and Coke to the community and give away the last of the locally-produced six and a half ounce bottles of Coke; and

WHEREAS, other smaller activities will include a 100-day giveaway of a case of Coke each day on a local radio station; a night out with the Union City Greyhounds, featuring a giveaway of logo fans and the last returnable bottles of coke; a giveaway of 100 gallons of Coke to one winner during the Obion Country Fair; and possibly something in conjunction with Corn Fest in September; and

WHEREAS, a tribute to local tourism and agriculture, the company's official logo for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary features an American bald eagle, cypress trees and ducks, all uniquely associated with Reelfoot Lake and tourism, and a field of corn to honor the local farming industry; and

WHEREAS, the Union City Coca-Cola Bottling Company is an historic landmark in Obion County; a family-run business operated by stellar individuals who work daily to better their community, the Union City plant exceed the standards of good business practices and serves as an exemplar of a community-based business that unites citizens around tradition and family values; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED SIXTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we hereby honor and congratulate the owners and hard-working employees of the Union City Coca-Cola Bottling Company, extend to them our gratitude for their exceptional business practices and community involvement, and join with them in celebrating 100 years of service to the people of Obion County and this great State.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.